

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release August 8, 1977

McGarvey 202/343-5634

"CRITICAL HABITAT" DETERMINED FOR MISSISSIPPI SANDHILL CRANE

About 26,000 acres of land in Jackson County, Mississippi, where the endangered Mississippi sandhill cranes live, have been finally designated by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as "critical habitat," pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

This ruling was published in the August 8, 1977, Federal Register.

On June 30, 1975, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director made an "emergency determination" of critical habitat for the Mississippi sandhill crane, covering a considerably larger area, and published it in the Federal Register. An imminent threat of habitat destruction was created by the construction of a new segment of Interstate Highway 10 in Mississippi.

Publication of the new notice automatically means that some modifications must be made in plans for construction of I-10 in the area.

The area determined to be critical habitat is privately owned and contains the only known population of the Mississippi sandhill crane. Private development on private land is not prohibited by the Endangered Species Act of 1973, but Federal agency action that would violate critical habitat is specifically forbidden by that law. Federal Interstate Highways are financed by a 90 percent Federal contribution to costs of construction.

This bird is non-migratory and confines its movements largely within the boundaries of its critical habitat, though there may be some wandering outside of the area. The population probably survived here because the land occupied was long considered unmanageable for agricultural, logging, or residential purposes, and consequently received little development or disturbance. The area in recent years has been increasingly subjected to various land uses including intensive forestry, residential development, and highways.

Nesting occurs in seven known places, mostly in the vicinity of the right-of-way of Interstate Highway 10. The nesting sites consist mostly of swamps, wet savanna, and open pine. It is the wet, open character of the land, plus the relative lack of disturbance, that make the area suitable for the crane.

In addition to the nesting grounds, there is a large winter roosting site in Pascagoula Marsh in the eastern part of the delineated area. All the suitable habitat within the area designated is currently used by, or has potential for future use by, the Mississippi sandhill crane.